The city of Bradford’s police department and its officers have a unique relationship with the community of Bradford. The police protect and serve a community unlike most; as Bradford has a rather adventurous and interesting rich history. The demographics of the city have changed however, today there is a different culture engulfing the area. With the rapidly changing demographics, questions are raised about many things, including the touchy subject of the possibility of racial tensions. Also, wherever there is a police department on duty, there are many expectations that the community places on the police. Citizens of Bradford have some unique views of how they want the police officers to work, and how good of a job they feel the police officers have done. After a few interviews, hours of research online, time spent behind books, and digging through records and old newspaper articles at the Historical Society, a solid structure to these theories and ideas has been discovered. The Bradford City Police share a relationship with their community unlike many others, with the rich history, changing demographics, possible racial tensions, and unique community expectations.

The city of Bradford itself, can easily be said by many to have one of the most interesting and explosive histories for a town. On July 14, 1875, oil was truly discovered in Bradford, Pennsylvania (Costik, 1997, p. 9). Jackson & Walker Co. struck an oil well that pumped out 85 barrels of oil a day for the first 30 days. Within the next 20 years, there were an estimated 15,000 oil wells in the Bradford field (Costik, 1997, p. 9). The small town in the woods boomed to a population of almost 20,000 people (Costik, 1997, p. 109). This may not seem to have much to do with the police department and its relationship with the community, but this is truly the reason the police department was ever founded. If it weren’t for the great oil boom, the city of Bradford wouldn’t have ever evolved into what it once was. The discovery of oil influenced the town, therefore influencing those who protect and serve it.

One could write a book on the history of the Bradford City Police Department in itself. Information that is often said to be difficult to come across has been discovered. There aren’t many records but after a trip to the Bradford Landmark Society, many old newspaper articles have been pulled out of the dust. The Bradford police have been on quite the roller coaster themselves over the years: whether it be the number of officers, officers losing their lives, or even them changing their headquarters; there are a lot of newspaper articles especially that prove these events.

The city actually really took pride in and respected their department back in the 20’s and 30’s. So much so that there was even a daily article in *The Bradford Era*, local newspaper, that gave a brief biography on a different police officer every day. The articles were under the title “The Men Behind the Shield” (The Bradford Era, 1930, p. 2) Since this would be rather strange to the community today, the question arises; what was so special about the cops back then? What makes them deserving of a newspaper article and not the police today? Well, it’s not because they had a lack of stuff to write about, because often times today people from out of town would almost laugh at the “silly” stuff that tends to show up in *The Bradford Era*. So clearly the newspaper today has room and can manage an interesting daily article, but the whole “The Men Behind the Shield” thing probably wouldn’t get as many hits today. There is one answer to the reason the police had their own article, and it is that people really felt they needed the police for protection, especially in Bradford, Pennsylvania during the 20’s and 30’s. Many people who even live in the town today are unaware of its history. Not only did Bradford have a huge oil boom that brought in a larger population, but there were gangs and mobs established in the city. These weren’t your everyday “wanna-be” gangs either, they were serious; and there were murders. One of the violent acts took place in an abandoned brewery in downtown Bradford. On August 1, 1925, two men known to be a part of the mob that ran Olean, New York, were found dead. They were thought to have come to Bradford to make a hit, but were instead hit themselves (Bradford Landmark Society). These brutal mobs are the most logical reason that the citizens of Bradford really relied and looked up to their police. For, law enforcement was the only thing standing between them and the violent actions and ways of the gangs.

In an article in *The Bradford Journal*, on Thursday March 31, 1977, it describes the look of police officers in the 1920’s and 1930’s. They wore long blue coats, and had no revolvers on outside of the coat like today (The Bradford Journal, 1977, p. 6). Each man was armed with a nightstick (article called “They Fought crime with sticks” (The Bradford Journal, 1977, p. 6). People who were arrested were transported to the police station by means of what they call “Black Maria,” a horse drawn van (The Bradford Journal, 1977, p. 6). The police officers were often referred to back then as “Blue Coats” (The Bradford Journal, 1977, p. 6). This wouldn’t be seen as a very advanced and safe police force today, but in the 1920’s and 1930’s, this was a rather secure and strong law enforcement unit; making the community feel that much more safe.

The police department in Bradford has undergone many changes that have affected the community they served. Dating back to September 8, 1902, when the police department was moved from the lane block on Pine St. to a wing in the city building (The Bradford Era, 1902, p. 1). This act created more sense of security for the citizens, as the department now had more holding cells, more resources, and was simply in a more suitable environment. That headquarters was later relocated to a whole new building designed only for the police station in 1983 on Kennedy St. (Olean Times Herald, 1983, p.6). This again created more security for the community and made working in law enforcement more comfortable for police. While digging through old files, it was also discovered that the Bradford Police Department actually put on an annual dance for the community. This is documented between the years of 1948 and 1962. A few of the programs to these dances still exist today. That alone shows that the police department and the community once had a fantastic relationship, not something you would necessarily see today.

As do most police departments, Bradford’s has been through its share of drama. For example, on December 24, 1952, almost half of Bradford’s police officers submitted resignations. No specific reason was ever projected, but the action was in protest to Council’s failure to grant the requested $50 monthly wage increase (McKean County Democrat, p. 8). Another incident took place in 1921, when police Chief Howe up-and-left the police department. The reason was unknown until he explained his story to the “Bradford Era”. He said he left due to the mayor’s failure to support the police department in stopping actual crime and serious misdemeanors. Howe also claimed that the mayor’s only concern for the police department was to stop noise on the streets at night outside of his home (The Bradford Era, 1921, p. 1-8). This probably shook the community a little as there was a dispute between the mayor of the city and the police chief, which ultimately resulted in losing the chief. As stated earlier, people were very fond of the police force in the 1920’s. Even in more recent history, on March 14, 2010, Bradford city police chief Mike Close was arrested after a domestic dispute with his significant other. This also made the community feel on edge, as it would to any community. It’s not every day that a police chief is charged for committing the crime of hitting and abusing a women. Many statements prove the communities’ unease can be found online at bradfordpa.info.

The demographics of Bradford have changed very much over the years. What was once a huge bustling oil city, has decreased in population significantly. The population in the 1920’s came close to 20,000 people, and the recorded population in 2008 was only 8,391 (City Data). The rate of decrease in the 21st century was around 2%, which isn’t as bad as the catastrophic 5% decrease Bradford experienced in the 90’s (City Data). 53% of the general population is females, and the remaining 47% are males (City Data). The median age of males is around 34, and the median age of females is about 38 (City Data). Crime rates are neither increasing nor decreasing, they’re instead just all over the place, but keep in a general statistical area. Between the years of 2008-2009, reported cases of forcible rape increased from 4-9 (City Data). The robberies and aggravated assaults however, both decreased (City Data). Theft in the area is also annually a steady pace. All categories of theft however also dropped for the years 2008-2009, including burglary, larceny, theft, and motor vehicle theft (City Data).

Although there minority numbers are increasing in Bradford, there is no direct evidence of there being any racial tensions. “I can only recall two reported crimes that had anything to do with racial tensions in the past two years…” said chief of police Chris Lucco (C. Lucco, personal communication, September 8, 2011). So surprisingly, there are fortunately almost no racial tensions in the area for police to deal with. Remember, these statements are based on the few reported cases, there are thousands of unreported crimes a year across the nation.

One of the most important jobs a police department has is meeting its community’s expectations. This goal however, is very hard if not impossible to reach. No police officer or department in general can satisfy every citizen in a community, it is simply impossible. It is extremely difficult to even know what exactly a community expects from police. Through a survey, an interview, and general knowledge of public expectations, it is easier to understand and comprehend how well the Bradford City Police Department meets the community’s expectations.

A community normally doesn’t have many concerns with the job of their police department; “most people are satisfied with the job done by the police most of the time” (Radalet, 1996, p. 110). On Monday, September 12, a survey was given to 30 random members of the Bradford Community. When asked to rate the overall performance of the Bradford Police Department, most (24) people stated their expectations were met. However, when these 30 people were asked how well they thought the department prevented crime and provided community service, 13 of them weren’t impressed, stating the police department falls short of their expectations. The Bradford Police Department scored okay on the remainder of the random survey, with the majority of the answers being positive to questions leaning towards police behavior and security in neighborhoods. For most of the entire survey, police in Bradford were rated to meet the community’s expectations. One of the only problems seems to lie in the police officer’s role in community service. It’s not like what it once was, where the police department held annual dances for the public, that’s for sure.

The community of Bradford is pushing for a more proactive police department, they want crimes solved, they want crimes prevented before they can even happen. “The public definitely wants us (police) to be a more proactive department” stated Chief of Bradford City Police, Chris Lucco (C. Lucco, personal communication, September 8, 2011). Knowing this, the Bradford Police Department has been trying to transform into a more proactive police force to the best of their abilities.

With the help of the state, and some voluntary work by some police officers, the Bradford Police Department was able to turn more proactive at the public’s request. In 2008 the Mike Close (former chief) and the Bradford police stepped up to the challenge (Schellhammer, The Bradford Era, p. 1-12). “We’re trying to develop into a proactive Police department” said then chief, Mike Close (Schellhammer, The Bradford Era, p. 1). They then created a street crimes unit, and the ERT (Emergency Response Team) (Schellhammer, The Bradford Era, p. 1-12). The emergency response team uses weapons often seen with S.W.A.T teams, and they even have a giant truck that transports personnel and equipment. Just one more way the Bradford Police Department is stepping up to community expectations and making the citizens feel that much safer.

It is clear that the city of Bradford’s Police Department and its’ police officers have a unique relationship with the community today, and even more so in the past. From all of the newspaper articles from the early 20th century that prove that the police were very valued and respected in the area, to the expectations the citizens of the Bradford area themselves stated through surveys for the department today; it is clear that the police department plays a huge role in the community. Every person in the community of Bradford has their own opinion and expectations of the police. In some cases police meet expectations; in others however, people believe there is still room for improvement.

So much has changed in the city of Bradford, but the importance of the police department still heavily exists. The demographics have changed greatly from what they once were; as there are now even more people of different races living in the area, and a decreasing population. Even with the percentages of races becoming more and more distributed, there has not been a very noticeable increase in racial tensions throughout the community.

The Bradford City Police share a relationship with their community unlike many others. They live in the shadows of a fabulous and rich history, both in the police department and the city alone. With these “big shoes to fill,” it is hard to say that the Bradford police are not doing a good job. The demographics of the city might not be as grand as they once were, but they are now unique and the Bradford police do a fine job of keeping order and peace throughout the communities many different races and opinions. One couldn’t stress enough about how important the community expectations are of a police department; even more so how well the police officers meet the expectations. It can easily be said however, that the fine ladies and gentlemen that “protect and serve” the city of Bradford, meet the expectations of the community to the best of their abilities.